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Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

Report on the 2001-2004 Business Plans

Chair: Mr. Charles Dent

Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

NOTICE

This document was produced by the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight pursuant to its review of Government of the Northwest Territories' 2001-2004 Business Plans.

This review was conducted during the period October 10 – 24, 2000, prior to the development of the 2001-2002 Main Estimates. In some respects, events may have overtaken certain references contained herein.

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Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

CONFIDENTIAL

November 15, 2000

HON. JOSEPH L. HANDLEY
GOVERNMENT HOUSE LEADER

Report on the Review of 2000-2004 Business Plans

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight, I am pleased to provide you with our Report on the Review of the 2001-2004 Business Plans.

We look forward to reviewing the draft Main Estimates in January, which I trust will reflect the Committees' comments and suggestions.

It is also our intention that these reports will form part of our Report to the House after First Reading of the *Appropriation Act, 2001-2002* in February.

If you have any questions or concerns, or require clarification of items or issues in our report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Charles Dent
Chairperson

Attachment

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The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight Review of the 2001-2004 Government of the Northwest Territories Business Plans

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The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight Review of the 2001-2004 Government of the Northwest Territories Business Plans

Program and Functional Review

The Committee is concerned about the impact of the proposed fee and permit increases outlined in the Program and Functional Review. It is feared the full impact and trickle down effect of these increases on the people of the Northwest Territories has not been identified.

Further to this, it was the Member's understanding from a presentation made by the Minister responsible for the Financial Management Board, each department would reference major initiatives outlined in the program and functional review in their business plans. The Committee noted that many departments did not clearly reference this review and subsequent changes in their business plans.

The Business Plans

Timing and Detail in Overheads

Again, the Committees felt that they were faced with a shortage of time between the Committee review process and the deadline for notifying government of any changes for the Main Estimates. Much of the detail that was requested by the Committees has not and will not be received before the deadline. It is difficult for Members to make informed decisions when they do not have all the information.

As was the case in previous business plans, the Committee noted that a great deal of information was provided in overhead presentations and handouts rather than in the business plan package. This results in extra time being required for the review process.

Forced Growth

The Committee noted that many of the Departments have not supplied forced growth in their operations expense detail beyond the 2001-2002 fiscal year in their business plans. Business plans are to plan for a three-year period, not just one. There was no attempt made to forecast changes in operational expense leading Members to believe that the fiscal forecast of government cannot be accurate. The Committee would like to know why the Financial Management Board Secretariat did not require more detail to be supplied.

Internal reallocations

The Committee continues to be concerned about the amount of money being shuffled within a department. Committees meet to review business plans and approve Main Estimates for the departments based on what is put before them. In approving the budget the Members are approving the plans and direction that each department should be following for the next year. More and more the Members are being asked to approve changes to departmental plans and budgets after the fact. It is not until the departments come before the Committees during the business plan review process, that Members learn that there has been reallocations within the department for major long-term organizational changes, studies and strategies that were not identified in previously. It is the responsibility of the departments and their Ministers to follow their business plans and keep the budgets that have been approved in the House.

Goals, Strategies, Targets and Measures

Overall, there has been noticeable progress made in the area of performance measures in the Business Plans. However, there is still room for improvement. It is noted that many departments have left blank spaces where they are to have included targets and there are still targets and measures that need to be made quantifiable so measurement can occur. There were inconsistencies between departments in regard to reporting departmental strategies; all departments did not supply a summary explanation for their strategies and funding amounts for the strategies.

Studies and Strategies

The Committee is alarmed over the number of studies and strategies that the government has undertaken. There appears to be no hard and fast deadlines when the studies and strategies are to be completed. Many of these studies and strategies have been dragging on for years. The Committee is of the opinion that government is fostering a culture of consulting and conferencing; every time a new issue is raised a new strategy is added. The monies could be better spent in programs and services for the people of the Northwest Territories.

The Committee requests that the government supply a listing of all studies, strategies and reviews that are in progress. In addition the Committee requests that target dates for completion be included and cost identified.

Self-government Agreements – Incremental Costs

The GNWT has taken the position that our government should not be responsible for incremental costs associated with self-government agreements. With this statement comes the need to determine the present costs of program delivery in each claim area.

During the review, departments stated that they could not state the present costs of programs they deliver to claimant groups. When funding needs for Nunavut had to be determined, the Government of the Northwest Territories implemented a geographic tracking system that still is in use today. Valuable collection on the cost of program delivery in all the different communities in the then Northwest Territories has been collected. The Committee would like to remind the departments that information on the cost of program delivery is available. Departments should be reviewing the information derived from the geographic tracking system and be able to speak to the cost of program delivery, past and present in each claim area.

The Committee sees the geographic tracking system to be a valuable tool and encourages the continued use of this system.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Quality Assurance

Delivery of Programs by Third Parties

More and more of the Government of the Northwest Territories programs are being delivered by third parties. It is feared that the standard of some programs may have reached the crisis stage. Departments have informed the Committee that they are aware that some programs may have reached a stage where services are substandard and may even be life threatening. However, they have absolutely no means to take corrective action. It is imperative that departments are given the tools to ensure third parties deliver programs that meet Government of the Northwest Territories standards.

Delivery of Programs by the Government of the Northwest Territories

The Committee is concerned that has been a gradual reduction in Government of the Northwest Territories' program and service levels. It is the concern of Members that some communities may have been more adversely affected than others. As stated earlier, the Committee sees the geographic tracking system to be a valuable tool. A tool that can be used to determine if some communities are shouldering more cuts in programs than others are. It can be used to compare funding over a period of time and identify areas for concern.

Interdepartmental Co-operation

There are a number of critical issues where formal co-operation is crucial between different departments. Time and again the Committees have requested that the departments meet and form plan of action that all can follow so progress can be made. The government has identified a number of strategies and programs that require interdepartmental co-operation. What is apparent to the Members is that the departments are not meeting and co-ordinating their efforts resulting in fragmented strategies and a lack of direction, During the business plan review, one Minister said

that the departments had met while the Minister of the partner department said they had not.

The Committee is displeased with the lack of inter-departmental co-operation. It is feared that this results in overlaps in functions, efficient use of resources in a time where government is facing a shortage of money.

Human Resource Management

Recruitment and Retention

Many departments have brought to the attention of the committees the difficulty they are having in the recruitment and retention of staff. It was indicated that for some professions that the salary and benefits offered by the Government of the Northwest Territories is not competitive with other jurisdictions.

It was noted that some departments have resorted to sole-sourced contracting to fulfil the duties required of a position. It is time for the government to look for other new and innovative ways to attract employees.

Affirmative Action

The Committee would like a consistent method of reporting Affirmative Action statistics in the Business Plans.

There continues to be dissatisfaction with Affirmative Action results. There may be a need to educate managers about the role and intent of Affirmative Action Policies within the government. It came to the attention of one committee that in one department, it was viewed that a career plan superseded the Affirmative Action policy when it came to Acting Appointments.

The Committee expressed to the Premier and his staff their concern over methods employed by all departments that may be seen as a means to avoid the Affirmative Action Policy. It is the perception of the public that non-affirmative action individuals are being hired on a casual basis and after a period of time are direct appointed to the position. The Premier responded that he would look into ways on how to monitor this.

Other Human Resource Information and Indicators

The Committee is of the opinion that the Government is taking a narrow approach in the reporting of human resource information and use of human resource indicators. The morale of Government employees is important to the organization. The Committee

encourages Corporate Human Resources to look at developing means of measuring staff morale. Indicators that can be used as a gauge of staff morale include, sick days absenteeism rates and staff surveys.

Further to this, it is important to the operations of the government that staff be kept current with new work practices and have the opportunity to access training. It is the view of the Committee that Business Plans should report information on staff training, transfer assignments, acting appointments, number of performance appraisals completed, exit interviews and staff turnover statistics.

Vacancies

There is concern that departments may be deliberately not filling positions within their department in order to ensure a funding pool within the department. In maintaining the positions in the organization chart, the department has a means to ensure dollars come in to the department. These salary dollars become a source of funds that can be reallocated to other programs within the department. The Committee is of the opinion that this situation has to be monitored and any vacant positions that extend over a specified period of time be reviewed for necessity. Further, when a position is held vacant in a small community the effect is more that when a position is held vacant in larger communities. In larger communities other staff may cover the duties of a vacant position. In small communities this is often not possible and program delivery suffers or ceases. It is important for departments to fill vacancies as soon as possible in smaller communities.

Increase in numbers of Staff

Active Positions by Region

Region	1996/97 Actuals	1997/98 Actuals	1998/99 Actuals	1999/00 Actuals	2000/01* ME
Headquarters	2,644.0	2,131	2,109	1,155	1,154
North Slave				1,021	1,044
Fort Smith	1,119.9	1,188	1,176	1,162	1,232
Inuvik	741.4	689	706	723	746
Total	**4,505**	**4,008**	**3,991**	**4,061**	**4,176**

It is the concern of the Committee that the numbers of staff positions may be gradually creeping up. In view of the number of vacant positions and the practice of reallocating salary dollars to other activities within a department, the Committee is of the opinion that this is an area that requires monitoring.

Community Formula Funding Changes

The Committee commented that communities should be actively involved in any decision making process that affects their communities. In many cases, essential information was not available to communities and overlapping responsibilities between departments further compounded this. Committee Members were of the position that if selected programs and services are devolved to communities, sufficient levels of funding, all related operating information and full involvement by the community in the decision should accompany these responsibilities. Further, funding levels should reflect increased operating costs in smaller and remote communities and also, to ensure effective recruitment and retention of qualified personnel.

Digital Communication Network

The five-year contract with Ardicom Ltd. to use the Digital Communication Network expires in 2001. To ensure that the Government of the Northwest Territories is receiving value for money it is imperative that a review of the contract occurs prior to its renewal.

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommends that the Financial Management Board Secretariat in conjunction with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and Department of Health and Social Services conduct a review of the Digital Communications Network.

And further, that this review examine the adequacy, affordability and future requirements of the Government of the Northwest Territories in determining whether the contract should be renewed, modified or retendered.

Review of the Legislative Assembly Business Plan

The Business Plan

The Committee noted that there were gaps in targets for the goals of the Legislative Assembly Business Plans as there are often no numbers or targets provided. The Legislative Assembly's response is that this is the initial year for the plan and baseline information is being collected. The Members would like to see more specifics.

Further to this, there is confusion in the business plan as to what are strategies, what are guidelines, what are policies and what are results statements.

Under the goal of "Public access to, and participation in the business of the Legislative Assembly is enhanced", there is a strategy that may require committee input. The strategy reads: "Investigate opportunities for enhanced public input into the business planning, budget and legislative process". The Committee decided to send a letter to attain further clarification as to what this strategy may entail.

Public Relations

The Committee discussed perceptions of consensus government held by people in southern Canada. One Member suggested that there might be a need to put more money into public affairs. The Speaker agreed to provide a copy of the public affairs strategy to Members.

Later discussions came back to the issue of the need to educate the public as to the role of Members and Ministers in the Legislative Assembly. The Assembly staff responded that there is information on the web site. The Chairman responded that not all people have access to the web site. It was suggested that pamphlets be made defining the roles of Members and Ministers and packages could be put together for Members to use on school visits.

Capital Area Development

The responsibility for maintaining the Capital Area is a shared responsibility with the City of Yellowknife, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the RCMP and the Department of National Defence. There was discussion on the impact of the Capital Area plan on a major developer in the city. The guidelines for the site are automatically required to be reviewed every five years. The plan is due to be reviewed. There is a Capital Site Steering Committee that is the process of commissioning guidelines. There will be an opportunity for public input.

Research Services

Members indicated that there is a need for Research Services to have targets for inclusion in the business plan. The Speaker and his staff responded that the Assembly is in its first year of operation in the new service environment and that the research section does track every Member's request for projects. The Members would like to have an assessment of how much of Research Services' time is being spent on Members' projects as opposed to committees. The Members feel that this information is necessary in order to see if there is a need for an increase in resources.

Reports on International Trips

Members of the Committee asked whether there will be any information produced for Committees when Members attend international conferences and meetings. It was indicated that this is an area that Committee may wish to talk about.

The Legislative Assembly Page Program – Out-of-Town-Pages

The opportunity to participate in the Legislative Assembly as a page is viewed as a valuable experience that should be available to all youth in the Northwest Territories. There was discussion around the cost and work required for pages to be brought in from the communities so that they may participate in the program. Presently the Members have to supply the resources and be responsible for the youth while they are in town. The Speaker indicated that if it is the desire of the Members, a program could be developed for out-of-town pages but it would cost money.

Human Resources

Affirmative Action

As with all of the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Committee expressed concern about the Affirmative Action figures. The Speaker indicated that there had been very little staff turnover so it is difficult to improve the Affirmative Action statistics.

Targets and Quantities

Members indicated the need for numbers to also be supplied for areas of Human Resource Management other than Affirmative Action; examples of such include transfer agreements, performance appraisals and staff training.

Cultural Awareness Programs

The Speaker indicated that presently there is no cultural awareness training for new employees and committed to checking on what other departments are doing in this area.

Retaining Expertise and Knowledge

Legislative Assembly staff indicated that there is a great deal of corporate knowledge that is not written down. Particular attention will be given during the year to allow other staff the opportunity to gain knowledge so there will not be corporate gaps in the organization, should someone leave.

Review of the Office of the Languages Commissioner

Review of the Business Plan

The Languages Commissioner submitted a four-year business plan, covering the years 2000 through 2004. In the business plan additional monies were requested. As the budget for the 2000/2001 fiscal year has already been approved, this will require modifications to be made to the work plans that were submitted. Further to this, it was noted that the Office did not follow Government of the Northwest Territories Business Plan format.

The Committee has been informed that the government's Aboriginal Languages Strategy is to be completed and presented to Committee by the end of November. Consequently, the Committee has not finalized its Report on the Review of the 2001-2004 Business Plans for the Office of the Languages Commissioner and reserves its final approval of this business plan until after the Aboriginal Languages Strategy is presented at the end of November. Should this strategy not be ready for presentation to the Committee at that time, the Committee will proceed as if there is no languages strategy in the planning and recommend funds be allocated accordingly.

The Languages Commissioner informed the Committee that the Government of the Northwest Territories lapsed $155,257.63 in Aboriginal Languages funding and $141,605.50 in French Language funding under the Canada – NWT Co-operation Agreement for Aboriginal and French Languages for the year ending March 31, 1999. The Office of the Official Languages has requested an 87% or $299,000 increase in the

budget; almost the exact amount that the Government allowed to lapse under the Canada – NWT Co-operation Agreement for Aboriginal and French Languages.

The Commissioner indicated to the Committee that because of the shortage of money for languages, the Office would like to have a one-umbrella approach to languages and has organized the office accordingly. The Languages Commissioner has submitted an ambitious plan that will require the addition of resources to the Office for it to be accomplished.

Proposed Changes to the Office

The Languages Commissioner proposes to reorganize her office to provide more support in three areas: advocacy, research and analysis, and public affairs. In order to do this, a reorganization of existing staff is proposed. The new structure would also add one new staff position.

The Languages Commissioner also plans to establish an Advisory Board. The Languages Commissioner Advisory Board will be composed of the already established Dene Subject Advisory Committee, board members from other language communities, elders and other individuals knowledgeable in language issues. The committee will assume an advisory role to the Languages Commissioner.

Aboriginal Languages Strategy

As noted earlier, the Government of the Northwest Territories has an Aboriginal Languages Strategy under development. The Committee is of the opinion that the development of this strategy has taken much too long and is overdue. This may have adversely affected Aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories and this year's business plan review. Languages are pivotal to culture and spirituality. It is known that the use of Aboriginal languages is declining. The Committee is of the opinion that the state of Aboriginal Languages has reached a crisis stage and something has to be done now.

From this Business Plan Review, the budget for the next year is determined. Without the Aboriginal Languages Strategy the Committee does not know if it agrees with the direction that the government is taking to preserve Aboriginal languages. The Committee has no way of knowing if the Office of the Languages Commissioner's Business Plan will be complimented by or overlap the strategy.

Review of the Official Languages Act

Compounded with the difficulty arising from the lack of an Aboriginal Languages Strategy is the need to review the *Official Languages Act*. Section 29 of the Act requires the Legislative Assembly or a committee of the Assembly review the provisions and operations of the *Official Languages Act* at the next session following December 31, 2000. The Legislative Assembly has decided to use a Special Committee to review the Act. This Special Committee may recommend changes to the legislation resulting in other changes to the Office.

Role of the Languages Commissioner

There is confusion as to the role of the Languages Commissioner. There is a difference of opinion as to whether present legislation empowers the Languages Commissioner to assume an advocacy role for official languages. The Languages Commissioner indicated the Canadian Languages Commissioner is assuming more of an advocacy role. It was also stated that advocacy had always been a part of previous budgets but now will become more of a focus. Some Members expressed the opinion that the Languages Commissioner should not be involved in lobbying.

The Committee is also concerned that there is a gap between what the people expect and what the Languages Commissioner can reasonably accomplish and is empowered to do. The role of the Languages Commissioner must be clarified in the new legislation.

The Budget for the Office of the Languages Commissioner

It is the opinion of the Committee that it is necessary to link, not duplicate, the language programs and services offered by government. The Languages Commissioner has requested an additional $133,000 to co-host a NWT Language Conference with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. This conference may be useful but should be considered in conjunction with the Special Committee struck to review the *Official Languages Act*. Therefore, at this time the Committee cannot support the Languages Commissioner's request for $133,000 for a NWT Languages Conference and $40,000 for Contract Services.

> ***The Standing Committee recommends that the budget for the Office of the Languages Commissioner be increased by $126,000 to cover the initiatives of one new staff position, website, purchased services, newsletter, and Advisory Board Meetings that were identified and described in the Business Plan.***